



County of Los Angeles  
**CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE**

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DAVID E. JANSSEN  
Chief Administrative Officer

November 19, 2003

To:

Each Supervisor

From:

David E. Janssen  
Chief Administrative Officer

Board of Supervisors

GLORIA MOLINA  
First District

YVONNE BRATHWAITE BURKE  
Second District

ZEV YAROSLAVSKY  
Third District

DON KNABE  
Fourth District

MICHAEL D. ANTONOVICH  
Fifth District

**RUNAWAY TRAIN PREVENTION REPORT**

On September 16, 2003, on a motion by Supervisor Molina (attached), your Board requested the Sheriff, Fire Chief, and Chief Administrative Office/Office of Emergency Management to meet with the Union Pacific (UP) and Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) railroads regarding measures to prevent runaway trains. These meetings were held as requested. During the meetings, representatives of each railroad provided information on preventative measures implemented to prevent runaway trains.

This memorandum summarizes those meetings and reports on measures that are being taken to address these issues as requested by your Board. My office has worked closely with the Fire Chief on these issues, and he concurs with this report.

Union Pacific

After the Commerce incident last July, UP evaluated its rail system and 19 derailment devices ("derails") have been installed to prevent unmanned cars from entering the mainline and becoming runaway trains. These derails protect mainlines from small and large yards and spur tracks where cars are routinely uncoupled and left unmanned. Protective derails have also been installed on spurs used by UP which extend from mainline trackage owned by Metrolink. Various types of derails are used based on location, track speeds, and types of cars/trains in the area.

The brief runaway which occurred in the Commerce yard on September 16, 2003, as reported by UP, caused no damage because the cars stopped due to the slight hill at the east end of the yard. Given this terrain feature, the Commerce yard derail was the last of the 19 to be installed, but UP representatives advised that this Commerce yard derail is now installed.

Each Supervisor  
November 19, 2003  
Page 2

In addition to the derails, UP conducts regular physical inspections of derails at least monthly. Also, routine proficiency tests of employees operating trains are done every month to assure compliance with operating rules, signal instructions, and general safety requirements.

UP further advises that they have implemented these corrective actions in conjunction with the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) and the California Public Utilities Commission (PUC), both of which oversee railroad operation and procedures. The FRA regularly audits and reviews railroad safety testing of track, equipment, and personnel. This Federal and State oversight has resulted in extensive personnel training and installation of protective devices described above. It is also clear that the actions of the FRA and PUC have resulted in specific protocols to avoid runaway trains.

#### Burlington Northern Santa Fe

Although BNSF has not experienced a runaway train in the Los Angeles area, the railroad conducted a mainline audit five years ago. This audit evaluated the level of protection needed for mainline trackage given switching yards and spur tracks that intersect with mainlines. Where deemed necessary, appropriate derail devices were installed.

Derails are inspected regularly and an annual audit is conducted to assure mainline protection is in place. Additionally, BNSF tests each signal every two or three weeks and is installing newer style signals across the system. Furthermore, operations tests are done almost daily on freight, passenger, and commuter trains to assure compliance and safe operation.

Like other railroads, BNSF works closely with the FRA and PUC for operational compliance in all areas. The FRA assists with focused testing of policies and procedures related to equipment, track, signals, and personnel.

BNSF has agreed to participate in the Los Angeles operational area emergency notification program whereby the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department is advised of any emergency or runaway train. Details of their participation will be worked out by December 1, 2003 in cooperation with the Sheriff and the Office of Emergency Management.

#### Legislation

On July 8, 2003, your Board directed the CAO to seek legislation to adopt revised notification protocols to avoid runaway train incidents, and, on September 16, 2003,

Each Supervisor  
November 19, 2003  
Page 3

your Board also instructed the CAO to seek legislation that requires railroads to develop measures to prevent future runaway trains and minimize the associated risks to County residents. The Federal Railroad Safety Improvement Act (S. 1402, McCain, R-AZ) includes amendment language offered by Senator Boxer that addresses your Board's concerns by requiring the Secretary of Transportation to issue regulations setting forth procedures for a railroad to immediately notify first responders in communities that lie in the path of a runaway train; requiring railroads to submit procedures for complying with these regulations, and requiring the Secretary to conduct a study on how this impacts public safety in train travel throughout the communities without grade separation. The bill was reported by the Senate Commerce Committee on October 30, 2003, and now awaits Senate floor action. The County's Washington advocates are supporting this bill based on the Board policies cited above.

If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call me, or your staff may contact Constance Perett, Office of Emergency Management, at (323) 980-2261.

DEJ:CP:jl

Attachment

c: Sheriff Lee Baca  
Chief P. Michael Freeman  
Emergency Management Council  
Louisa Ollague, First District  
Brian Center, First District  
Randi Tahara, Second District  
Joseph Charney, Third District  
Carl Gallucci, Fourth District  
Matt Knabe, Fourth District  
Jennifer Plaisted, Fifth District  
John Krattli, County Coun  
Violet Varona-Lukens, Executive Office, Board of Supervisors

AGN. NO.

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR GLORIA MOLINA

September 16, 2003

On September 10, 2003 an unmanned Union Pacific train began to roll on its own eastward from Los Angeles; it traveled some distance before being stopped in East Los Angeles. This is a very disturbing development in the wake of the previous Union Pacific derailment that damaged homes and terrified residents last June.

Although Union Pacific did follow the interim notification protocols previously established with the Sheriff's Department, Union Pacific must be held accountable for developing effective, preventive measures to safeguard residents.

It is essential that corrective measures be immediately developed and implemented to prevent railroads from allowing unmanned train sections to de-link and run away, with the possibility of derailment and the attendant dangers to the surrounding communities. These runaway trains threaten not only adjacent residents, but also the broader region if trains are carrying hazardous materials.

I THEREFORE MOVE that Board of Supervisors instruct the Fire Department, Sheriff Department and the Office of Emergency Management to request a meeting

MOTION

Molina

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Yaroslavsky

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Knabe

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Antonovich

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Burke

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with representatives from Union Pacific to develop measures to prevent runaway trains and minimize their impacts should they occur despite the implementation of those measures. These measures should include all feasible actions to minimize the risks to residents associated with derailments.

I, FURTHER MOVE that Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad be requested to report on its safety measures and to cooperate in the development of similar notification protocols with the Sheriff's Department.

Furthermore, I request that the Board of Supervisors ask the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) to conduct a complete audit of all Union Pacific safety measures and to assist the parties in the development of the protocols for avoiding runaway trains.

Additionally, I request the Board of Supervisors to seek appropriate legislation that requires railroads to develop measures to prevent future runaway trains and minimize the associated risks to our residents.

GH/jh